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An introduction provides a brief history of foreign language study in the primary school in various countries and a brief examination of the different attitudes toward early foreign language study. The body of the article presents a case for foreign language study in the primary school on the grounds of sociopolitical developments, trends in primary education, and, to a lesser extent, the nature of language and the psychological characteristics of the child. Problems considered are (1) choice of language, (2) content and method, (3) planning and continuity, (4) teachers and their training, and (5) evaluation of results and research. (AF)

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A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL?

by

H. H. Stern

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Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages in the primary school arouses widespread interest today. It is significant that in the present series of talks at this congress, no other stage of language teaching - the secondary school, the university or adult education - has been singled out in a similar fashion and has a complete afternoon session exclusively devoted to itself. Just over ten years ago, at another international gathering on foreign language teaching, the UNESCO Seminar at Nuwara Eliya in Ceylon, Professor Andersson of the USA, a pioneer of language teaching to younger children in primary schools, had to struggle to have this topic altogether included among the subjects worthy of discussion. It was regarded as marginal, as mildly freakish; eventually as a result of Professor Andersson's paper it was recognized as exercising "a healthily unsettling effect". (UNESCO, 1955, page 97). What has happened meanwhile? Is this just a fashion that has come over the educational world in the last ten years, or is it an important issue to which language teachers and others interested in languages and in primary education ought to pay attention? How should we view it? With enthusiasm, or scepticism or frank opposition? Whether we like it or not the interest in this new field of language teaching has increased enormously all over the world.

A definition

To avoid misunderstanding to begin with let us quickly define our terms. Primary education refers in some countries to the all-age elementary school, the Volksschule; in others it means an initial stage in education which is completed at the age of ten, eleven or twelve, the Grundschule in the German nomenclature, to be followed by a more advanced or secondary stage. In this talk I am mainly concerned with primary education in this second sense: the learning of languages by younger children, ranging from the preschool kindergarten or nursery school through the various stages of the primary school roughly to the age of

ten or so.

The facts

In a certain way this is a very old story, but in other respects it is new. It is old in the sense that the foreign governess, Fraeulein, Miss or Mademoiselle, who would speak her language to the children so that they would 'pick it up' has been a recognized institution in privileged families for centuries. Montaigne was taught Latin from birth by servants who could speak no French. John Stuart Mill, as a seven-year-old, read Aesop's Fables in the original and was acquainted with Lucian, Socrates and six dialogues of Plato; at eight he started Latin and by ten he could read Plato and Demosthenes with ease. In the private schools for young children in many countries from Argentina to the United Kingdom the early learning of French or another foreign language is certainly nothing new.

On the contrary, educational reformers of a generation or so ago regarded this early learning of foreign languages as educationally unsound; they felt it was premature to press another language on children who were still learning to speak, read and write their own. And with the spread and systematization of publicly maintained schools it became axiomatic that the early part of schooling should be in the vernacular. The basis of primary education should be the language skills of the native tongue, an introduction to the culture and society of the child's own country. He should branch out into foreign languages only at the secondary stage and since only a limited number of children did in fact enjoy a secondary education, the learning of a foreign language was always regarded as the hallmark of some form of advanced schooling, not an element of basic literacy.

But whenever and wherever language standards have come under review the complaint has always been: "Too little and too late". In some countries this complaint had more force than in others. For example, in the United States the inadequacy of language courses at the secondary stage has been criticized for many years and experiments to start languages in elementary schools go back at least to the twenties. (Birkmaier, 1960). But it was above all since the Second World War that the demand for reconsidering

the dogma that a second language is only for the secondary school has been seriously challenged. And in that sense, the demand for foreign languages in the primary school is new.

The interest in it grew so much in the fifties that UNESCO urged the UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg, in 1960/61, to review the position internationally and to call an expert meeting. The enquiries led to information on 45 countries.[1]

The position was different from what one might have expected. It was found, to the surprise of the investigators, that in only six countries was there no teaching of languages at the primary school. That left as many as thirty-nine countries, which had experience in primary-school foreign languages. The term primary school of course covers a variety of institutions and age groups. If we exclude the seven countries in which language teaching occurs only after the age of ten it still left the surprisingly large number of 32 countries which somehow somewhere had experience of language teaching to younger children.

In 10 of these it was in fact a widely established practice. This applies primarily to the teaching of French or English in the school systems of African states in which the European language was the necessary medium of instruction. In a second group of countries it was not a universal practice, but it occurred in certain bilingual areas (e.g. in Belgium or Wales or the Vallée d'Aoste in Italy) and, as has already been mentioned, in many private schools, e.g. in the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, England and other countries. Finally, there were reports from several countries of what might be called an experimental approach to language teaching in the primary school; where for educational, linguistic or psychological reasons experiments and reforms had deliberately been instituted, in some countries in a limited way and in others on quite a large scale. It was found that this had happened in 14: Argentina, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, England and Wales, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Scotland, Sweden, U.S.A. and U.S.S.R.

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[1]The results are described in detail in the published report (Stern, 1963).

The enquiries of the UNESCO Institute showed that this is an issue of greater complexity, variety and urgency than was first thought. (a) In some countries a second language was needed early in a child's schooling as a lingua franca which will serve as a medium of communication and education. Hindi and English in India, Russian in the USSR, English or French in parts of Africa fulfill this role. (b) Then there are bilingual or multilingual countries in which the mutual learning of the languages forming the whole society has great importance for the survival of the community. (c) Thirdly, there are vast numbers of countries in which the vernacular is a language of restricted distribution and whose economic and political survival largely depends on contact with the outside world. Here too, we find the learning of languages by school populations a very important issue. Several smaller European countries are in this position. But this group also includes some of the newer states of Africa and Asia, many of which face very complex language problems. (d) Then there are the problems of special groups, above all migrants, e.g. Puerto Ricans in New York, Pakistanis in Huddersfield, Italians in Western Germany, etc. Their children face a second language learning problem as soon as they enter school. (e) Then, finally, there are the countries in which the major European languages are spoken; in these countries, too, it is universally felt that in spite of the wide distribution of these languages none can singly claim to be self-sufficient. It is an interesting phenomenon that in all these countries there is today a marked demand for a better knowledge of other languages, and with this demand has come the study of the problem of introducing these languages into the education of children at an early stage.

Since the data were collected for the Hamburg enquiry in 1961/62 the development has continued unabated.

Recent developments: Britain as one illustration

In Britain, by way of example, where a very thorough re-examination of language teaching has been taking place for the last few years foreign languages in the primary school began to make a serious impact in 1961 with a particular experiment in a school in Leeds. (Kellermann, 1964). Side by side other primary schools

started teaching a foreign language. There was a considerable increase in 1962. In the winter 1962/63 some 280 schools seemed to teach a foreign language.

A further increase - to approximately 700 to 1,000 schools - occurred in the course of the years 1963 - 64.

In 1963 the Ministry of Education, announced a remarkable experimental scheme for the teaching of French in primary schools with the intention of finding out how best to incorporate a language into the primary schools.[1] This experiment has already begun with an ambitious teacher training programme carried out partly in France and partly in Britain. The teaching of pupils will begin this month in 120 selected primary schools in 13 areas of the country involving 6,000 children, app. aged eight. It is intended to be a progressive scheme, i.e. to continue into the secondary stage of these children's education. It was stipulated that this continuity into the secondary stage must be guaranteed by the local education authorities taking part in the pilot scheme. The schools are not forced to use any particular curriculum; they can choose the material with which they wish to teach. However, to put the best material possible at their disposal the Ministry is co-operating with the Nuffield Foundation which has launched a parallel foreign languages teaching materials project. The object of this project is twofold: (1) to collect and study available teaching materials for the teaching of languages to younger children; and (2) to produce teaching materials for the experimental scheme covering roughly an age range of 8 to 13. The whole undertaking is not an experiment in any narrow sense. What is intended is to gather systematically information and experience on the feasibility of teaching languages in the primary schools and the efficacy of various types of teaching materials and methods.

Linguists' reactions

From my various contacts with linguists in Britain and abroad, I would conclude that linguists have given foreign languages in

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[1] A convenient explanation of this scheme may be found in Educational Research in a symposium on curriculum research (Ministry of Education, 1964)

the primary school a mixed reception. Some are wholeheartedly in favour of this reform, indeed enthusiastically so. Others are more sceptical; they are less convinced that this is the answer to language learning difficulties. And a number are actively hostile; they feel that this is a colossal waste or misdirection of energies. Sometimes the movement is derisively described in Britain as a "bandwagon". But, for example, our Modern Language Association is supporting it as an experiment worth trying and several of our members are actively engaged in helping to train primary teachers. We are represented on the two committees concerned with the scheme I have just described; and there is a good deal of benevolent interest among teachers. Undoubtedly there are some who are anxious about standards of teaching foreign languages in the primary schools and some who have already come up against problems of rather bewildering differences in standard of performance at the beginning stages of the secondary school when certain children come along with very good foundations, others with none and others with pathetic misinformation and poor pronunciation learnt from ill-trained or untrained language teachers.

Some advocates of primary school language teaching brush aside these critical observations of the sceptics as merely an indication of hardening of the arteries. I should like to treat them more sympathetically and want to bear them in mind when considering the merits of this reform.

Some dubious arguments

Enthusiasts for languages in the primary school often put forward dubious arguments and damage a good cause. Thus in Britain in the early sixties it was often said: "We must introduce languages in the primary schools, because we will need languages much more, when we join the Common Market". Britain is not in the Common Market; does this now invalidate the need for a language at the primary stage. Surely not.

Others, in my view, make too much of the linguistic potentialities of young children: "Children acquire such a good accent so easily". "Children learn languages so easily." "They are less self-conscious than adolescents." "They have a better memory."

Such arguments are either mistaken or at best half-truths. To get them right is not only a matter of intellectual satisfaction. It has an influence on the outlook and practical measures to be proposed.

If we start from the mistaken assumption that languages are easy for young children, we may be led to the dangerous conclusion that introducing languages into the primary schools is an easy matter. This I think is a serious mistake and will lead to naive, over-confident measures, and in the long run will do a disservice to language teaching, children's education and society.

The argument presented here

In this talk I should like to argue from a different premise, namely: Foreign languages are right and good for children in their primary education. I want to argue the merits of the case, mainly (1) on grounds of socio-political developments, (2) on grounds of primary education, (3) to a certain extent on the nature of language, and (4) to some degree, although far less so than is commonly done, on the psychological characteristics of the child. Having tried to establish that there is a good case for this reform, I would then like to face squarely the problems that it is likely to meet. We as linguists have then a task to perform to help in the solution of these problems.

It would in my opinion be a disastrous mistake to approach this task with the persuasive and facile attitude: 'Young children are natural language learners. They learn it so easily without any effort'. It flies in the face of all past experience of teaching anything at the primary stage. Even such relatively simple skills as the elements of reading or handling of number have proved to be much more complex than was first thought. It is only after painful trial and error over decades that we have come round to accepting the fact that prolonged and patient research is needed to solve all the problems. And it would be most surprising if foreign languages were to present fewer problems than the teaching of particular skills in the mother tongue.

Let us then accept the fact that a language has its place in the primary school not because it is easy, but because it is right.

If we can convince ourselves of that, we will muster the necessary energy to solve the problems we will encounter.

We must therefore examine the merits of the case for a foreign language in the primary school.

Socio-political considerations

I am looking upon language teaching in the primary school as part of the upsurge of interest in language teaching which has grown so much over the last few years. The topics discussed at this conference indicate clearly the trends of this reform.

There is today a widespread awareness in most countries - and in a gathering such as this, one need hardly dwell on it - of an increasing internationalization of public life, a growing interpenetration of the countries of the world, a coalescence of the world community. This can be observed in politics, economics, culture, science, sport, travel, literature, radio, TV and film. Within the countries it affects the whole population, not only an elite. As a result of the democratic spread of education it has become a problem for entire communities.

It is then a movement of teaching more languages to more people in a more efficient way. But it is not only that; it is also a more international way of looking at the whole curriculum, the teaching of history and geography, for example, or the teaching of the native language, indeed the whole make-up of an educational system.

We tend to forget that our educational systems had their foundations laid in an age of relatively small independant nation states. They transmit a largely national culture and are primarily vernacular systems with much emphasis on national traditions, national values, and a national language.

They are even today still in the main monocultural, monolinguistic and ethnocentric, even if they do not go in for the more blatant national selfadvertising of a few decades ago. This applies to the whole system from the primary school to the university.

But if there is any part of educational systems which in its conception tends to be limited to the cultural and linguistic heritage

The spreading of language learning

Even if we follow the argument to this point, many of us, as academically trained linguists of an older generation, will still have to overcome certain inhibitions. Our point of view tends to be limited by our own training. Most of us learnt languages first as pupils in grammar schools or their equivalents, lycée, hoehere Schule, etc. For us it is almost ordained that this is the right way of doing it. We continued at university and studied academically the history and literature of a language. In this way we have acquired certain standards and a framework of ideas which determine the way we look at the language learning problem. The limitations of our point of view, however, become pretty obvious as soon as we remember that we are a minority of those who tried to learn languages, and that those who had a chance of trying in turn are a minority of the population of a country.

What is being attempted today is on a different scale. It is an attempt to teach languages to a vastly increased number of people and not to confine it to a social or educational élite. It is not only an extension in terms of numbers. It is also a widening of objectives. Languages can be studied for all kinds of reasons. Our own preoccupations may have been largely philological and literary. These are legitimate. But other objectives, e.g. of oral communication, or of personal contact, are also justifiable.

Present-day interests in language teaching are therefore greatly extended. And there is - and as linguists we must recognize this - widespread discontent with the results of foreign language teaching. In England there is almost a national 'inferiority complex' about the Englishman's linguistic capacities and in U.S.A. the problem has been treated like a national emergency. But even in countries which internationally have a reputation of providing good language training, if we examine the situation more closely, we find that they face a serious language learning problem. There is everywhere concern about language standards and the effectiveness of language teaching in keeping with present-day needs. These misgivings we must take seriously and for that reason alone we as linguists ought to welcome experimentation in many directions

and to treat it sympathetically. Language teaching in the primary school can be looked upon as one of several reforms at present advocated, tried and practised which are leading to an expansion of foreign languages throughout the whole educational system from the primary school to the university and to adult education.

Language teaching in the primary school may not in itself be the panacea for all language ills. But it is one approach among several to the problem. And the prima facie case which can be made for it is that as linguists we know that languages are difficult, and in order to learn a language time is needed and opportunity for systematic practice. Starting a language in an early phase of education will, to say the least, provide both these, and for those reasons alone we should feel favourably inclined towards it.

Child psychology and learning a language in the primary school

On psychological grounds there is also a good case to be made for languages in primary education, although I am afraid this is often rather overstated. For the sake of a sound policy it is important to get the proportions and the emphasis right.

There is something very attractive about the thought of learning a second language in the manner of child's learning of the native language or about the way in which a young child in a multilingual milieu manages to cope with several languages without even being aware of a language barrier.

Powerful support for learning foreign languages in this way came several years ago from the Canadian neurophysiologist Penfield who claimed on the basis of neurological evidence that there was a biological time-table for language acquisition and this places the capacity to develop new speech mechanisms into the early years of childhood. (Penfield and Roberts, 1959) Penfield based his convictions partly on the results of studies of brain damage at different stages of life. The capacity to recover speech in cases of aphasia is greater the younger the patient. But Penfield also cited psychological evidence and the observations on the language development of his own children. The publication of these views

in a scientific book on brain mechanisms did not fail to make its impact.

Penfield's view-point co-incides with widely reported casual observations of teachers who have had contact with young children in a situation of second-language learning. Observers usually stress the unselfconsciousness of younger children, their willingness to imitate; their enjoyment of practising simple linguistic skills and lastly of course the success of early learning. In contrast with this the failure of language learning in the adolescent phase is pointed out; it is often said that the adolescent is less willing to imitate, is more self-conscious and is poorly motivated.

It seems fairly certain that the characteristic approach to language learning changes with age, that it is different in young children from that of learning in adolescence and again different in the adult.

However, in these observations certain facts are usually not sufficiently borne in mind:

(1) The problem of learning a language in earliest infancy, i.e. in the first years of life, is different in character from learning a language in the classroom, however early the start is made. In native language learning no established language habits interfere; secondly, also the language learning takes place in the functional setting of natural use of language. Learning in the classroom in the primary school - however 'natural' we try to make it - cannot recreate this primal bliss. It has therefore much more in common with language learning in early adolescence than with the language learning of infancy.

(2) Experience has shown that language teaching in the primary school requires at least as much professional skill as later teaching. The so-called language learning capacity of the young does not compensate for lack of ingenuity in the teacher. If children are badly taught they fail to learn just as they would fail to learn at later ages.

(3) If we draw attention to the particular advantages that

children bring along we must also pay attention to their shortcomings, and to the advantages as well as the drawbacks of other stages.

To assume that children will pick up languages just because they are young is inviting disappointment and failure. Young children require very skilful teaching and carfully designed teaching materials. Young children bring to language learning certain characteristics which are assets for certain aspects of the language learning process, e.g. a willingness to accept an adult's instructions without too many questions, an enjoyment of skill practice for its own sake, enthusiasm for novel activities and an interest in playing with language.

Moreover, during these early years of schooling very basic attitudes of mind on a deep emotional level are taking shape. These include attitudes to other countries, attitudes to language in general and the phenomenon of a foreign language. If we want children to become mature adults in the present-day world we must do our part in education so that contact with another language and another country is a positive experience. If you don't have a language in the primary school you are in danger of fostering by default the monoglot's arrogance, a narrow parochialism or an insularity of outlook which, incidentally, is not a defect only of those of us who live on islands.

The argument, then, for language learning at the primary stage is that it is psychologically justifiable and appropriate, because it is likely to be beneficial for children's linguistic, emotional, social and intellectual growth.

Against this, however, it must be recognized that young children lack certain qualities which the adolescent has developed, above all more sustained powers of learning and memorizing, more insight, a greater capacity for grasping abstractions, and to work from written materials. The adult again will have other qualities which favour language learning in certain ways and have disadvantages in other directions. (Ingram, 1964)

It is of course right that one should take stock of the characteristics of childhood and emphasize those vital aspects of effective language learning to which children are likely to be

particularly responsive, namely oral communication, dialogue and dramatic role playing. But this can be done without minimizing the characteristic features of other stages, or making extravagant claims for the young child's language learning capacities.

If this rather guarded point of view concerning the psychology of the child in relation to language learning is accepted we can also avoid dogmatism concerning an optimal age of language learning. For there is no such thing as <u>the</u> best age. Different ages have different merits and drawbacks. All one can say is that languages can justifiably be introduced at any stage from the nursery school upwards. The more we wish language learning to approximate to language learning in a bilingual situation in childhood the earlier we should start; the earliest would no doubt be the stage of nursery or preschool education.

It is a simple question of urgency. The younger the children when they start learning the more prolonged can be the contact with the language, and the better the result.

In practice age eight or, in other words, two or three years after school entry, has established itself as a sound age partly for developmental reasons and partly also because it comes in after the process of learning to read and to write the native language is well on the way. But there is nothing sacred about it. There is experience at hand of starting a second language before native tongue literacy and even alongside it.

<u>The task ahead</u>

Teaching foreign languages in the primary school can be justified on political, social and educational grounds; it is good language teaching policy and it has psychological merits.

But it has already been made clear in this talk that not all will be plain sailing. Problems and difficulties have to be faced which are likely to be as great as in any other educational reform. To underestimate the size of the undertaking would be a mistake.

In this final part of the talk I should like to indicate some of the tasks ahead. It is here that the help of linguists will be

greatly needed. Most of the issues depend in their solution on the understanding, interest and active co-operation of linguists.

What makes the outlook hopeful is that these tasks are already being clearly faced, and many of the problems are being tackled. I should like to draw attention to five problem areas:

(1) Choice of language;
(2) Questions of content and method;
(3) Problems of planning and continuity;
(4) Teachers and teacher training;
(5) Evaluation of results and research.

(1) Which language?

The choice of the language or languages to be selected for teaching in primary schools presents a very important problem. It is part of the major planning that should determine the language teaching policy of a country and it is not a matter to be treated lightly. The investment in time, energy, financial resources, production of materials, training of teachers is always considerable and it is impossible to switch rapidly from one language to another.

In the countries on which the Hamburg conference had information, English was the most frequently taught primary school foreign language, followed in order of frequency by French, Russian, German and Spanish.

The chief criterion would probably be the value of the language to the community as a whole and to the individuals in it as a means of communication now or in the future. It must be justifiable as a worthwhile experience within the primary school and as a foundation for later learning and continued use. Facilities for study beyond the primary school must be available. The decision is in some ways, of a political nature, but one would urge those who have the final word on this not to be swayed by short-term political considerations, but to look at the problem more in terms of decades or even in secular terms, and to bear in mind the many facets of the issue: travel, commerce, cultural and scientific exchange, political information and contact, literary

merits, the nature of the language as a lingua franca.[1]

It does mean that the education authorities in different countries will have to rank languages in order of overall merit. The conclusion may be reached that no single language can claim unquestionable superiority.

In that case it will be a matter of planning for two or three languages to be available. Undoubtedly a language started in the primary school should be one on which it is worth spending the major portion of time set aside for foreign language learning, because it receives inevitably the lion's share.

(2) Content and method

Here there is already a basis of considerable experience and a consensus of opinion. It is generally agreed that mere exposure to the language (a language bath, soaking up), although a necessary feature of early language learning, is not enough. There must be some form of systematic teaching. But systematic teaching alone is also not enough. There must be some opportunity for the functional use of the language. Here the experience of schools using a foreign language as a medium of instruction, including certain bilingual and international schools, will be of value.

The way the systematic teaching is arranged is, however, still open to controversy. There are certain elements which are widely accepted. There is (1) emphasis on the audiolingual aspect; (2) delay of reading and writing; (3) attention to imitation and memorization; (4) insistence on frequent but short lessons; (5) use of games, dramatization, puppets, pictures and audiovisual aids;

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[1] It is also important that these decisions should not be influenced by such purely subjective evaluations as "Language A is more beautiful than Language B". Also the customary opinion that "Language A is easier (or more difficult) than Language B", (although theoretically it might be possible to arrive at such a judgement on the basis of a careful contrastive analysis of two foreign languages in relation to the native language) is in practice usually ill-founded and should play no part in deciding which language is to be taught in the primary school.

(6) some attempts to teach something of the country and its culture: its geography, history, music, poetry, art and life - at the level appropriate for young children. There are already programmes and courses available which incorporate some of these features, e.g. the French CREDIF course Bonjour Line, the American French course Parlons Français, the English productions for the teaching of French Bon Voyage, and the teaching of German Los, also the courses produced in Sweden by Professor Gorosch.

All these courses and others which are already available or now being produced make slightly varying assumptions about the language learning process or the psychology of the child as a language learner. But by and large they have much in common. Excellent techniques have been developed, and very good progress can be reported. The combination of providing interest at the child's level, using attractive visual aids (e.g. films, film strips, wall charts or flannel boards), with authentic auditory experiences through the use of the tape recorder, language laboratory and record player places highly competent material at the disposal of the teacher.

Some methodological queries.

However, many important queries remain and are beginning to receive attention:

(a) There is the question of whether the material should be based mainly on children's interests in topics, activities and situations, or mainly on carefully graded structures, programmes and a controlled vocabulary.

(b) Another problem is whether the language learning should be largely one of unconscious storing up of sentences and structures learnt by imitation and repetition or whether children should be encouraged to understand something of the linguistic processes with which they are confronted.

(c) How far should the language be taught as a medium of oral communication? At what stage should writing and reading begin to be included?

(d) Should we ruthlessly exclude the use of the native language or should a mixed approach be tolerated.

(a) Situation or structure

Although some systematic teaching is regarded as essential, it is as yet not clear what the basic principle of progression should be.

One view is that language learning for young children must be completely embedded in functional situations and therefore that the principle of progression is not grammar or structural aspects of the language, however disguised, but simply situations, topics and activities. Instead of a progression in terms of grammatical categories, the course progresses along such themes as: greetings, in the classroom, getting up, playing a game, mask making, Christmas. In such arrangements effective use can be made of pictures, situations presented audiovisually, also toy houses, favourite children's games such as Snakes-and-Ladders, toy telephones and costumes.

Against this approach it has been argued that linguistically it presents so many difficulties that, in spite of its superficial attractiveness and appeal for children, they will soon get bogged down in the intricacies of the language. Hence the other point of view is to start with simple structures and a limited vocabulary and to transform and develop the structures and build up the course more on the demands of the language and the success in handling carefully graded material.

Primary teachers tend to favour the first emphasis, linguists the second. But they are not mutually exclusive. Creating situations and providing cultural background, developing children's interests and attitudes is justifiable on linguistic grounds as well as from the point of view of the psychology and education of young children. But in isolation it would be difficult to sustain a progression and to develop an effective command. Therefore no doubt it must be tempered by an approach from a stricter linguistic, structural control. A task for the future is to find the right balance and functional relationship of these two elements.

Content studies: long-term research

In order to obtain really adequate teaching material for this stage

we need in fact far more information than is at our disposal at present on children's language, interests, activities and the cultural milieu in which they live. (Stern, 1964). Such a study on the basis of an exchange has recently begun in Britain and France. In France it is sponsored by CREDIF, in Britain by the Foreign Language Materials Project of the Nuffield Foundation. If much material becomes available it should lead to an even richer and more authentic approach in the material prepared for teaching at this stage, although some of the authors of existing courses may intuitively have grasped what is required.

(b) Mimicry

In present-day language teaching there is usually a good deal of emphasis on the need for repetition, imitation, mimicry, memorization, drill and automatic response.

It is sometimes argued that this approach through mechanical learning without analysis and understanding is the essential merit of language learning at the primary level. It is sometimes treated as a process of storing up utterances without the child being conscious of what is being learnt.

This approach undoubtedly has its points. Much language learning at any stage involves copying from a model. And much of this may occur without full attention and without any analysis of the linguistic processes. But if it is over-emphasized, 'over-learning', fixing automatic responses can lead to loss of flexibility and stereotyped behaviour, quite apart from the loss of interest through sheer boredom.

When some linguists in ignorance of trends in primary education want a language in the primary school "because the early stages of a language should be done by methods of mechanical drill", they ought to remember how much such views fly in the face of current aspirations of primary education. Primary schools are just emerging from a surfeit of mechanical drill in their approach to spelling and number. They are strongly promoting creative activities, they try to provide sustained intellectual stimulus to children and to encourage understanding. It would be most regrettable if the boredom of mechanical drill driven out with

old-fashioned arithmetic would re-appear through the back-door in the new guise of foreign language teaching.

A language does of course need planned practice and repetition. Modern structure practice or pattern drill with its emphasis on careful grading and intensive practice provides this and can play a useful part in language teaching at this stage. The fact that the teaching of grammatical features of a language can be carried out without necessarily formulating abstract statements should be found an asset in the teaching of young children.

But such practice does not have to, nor should it, insult the intelligence of young children. Much of it will involve the full attention of the learner who like a detective must observe, discriminate and experiment. Provided these needs are borne in mind as much as the need for imitation, repetition and automatic response, learning a language should be a highly stimulating task at the level of intellectual growth at the primary stage. And the introduction of a language will not run counter to current convictions on primary education.

(c) <u>Oral to graphic</u>

In language teaching generally there is at present a strong reaction against the pre-occupation with writing and the printed word customary in language teaching a generation or so ago and even today. This emphasis on the oral approach is very understandable. It is not sufficiently realized by language teachers how much our practices are dominated by a pre-occupation with the graphic aspect of the language. This has led in some quarters to a dogmatic banning of the printed word, certainly in work with beginners and particularly in work with young children.

It is felt that the young child, who is hardly yet an inverterate reader and writer, is less contaminated by the printed word and for many advocates of early language learning this is one of the major reasons for favouring the start in the primary school.

It is widely believed that the interference of the printed word has much to do with the bad pronunciation of many language learners. And there is, therefore, a powerful trend of opinion that early language learning must be entirely audio-lingual. What is

less clear is for how long the exclusion of writing and reading should be maintained and how the transition to the graphic should be effected.

There is certainly much truth in the assertion that in language learning we do not pay sufficient attention to training in listening without the support of the printed word, and that the haphazard introduction to language in writing interferes with listening and speaking.

Yet the current tendency to dogmatize, prescribing a set time lag, and to withhold the written side for a week, a fortnight, so many months or even a year is no guarantee that all will be well. Once a child has learnt to read and write it is fictitious to treat him as a non-reader. We can prevent him from seeing the language in writing, but we cannot prevent him from imagining it written in terms of his native language. The graphic element admittedly may interfere and produce grotesque misinterpretations. But it also helps and clarifies. It is difficult to sustain that reading and writing are good in the native language, but bad in the foreign language. At whatever stage the written word makes its impact there will be interference. We cannot prevent it by merely delaying it. The only way to stop it is to treat it as a distinct problem in the language learning process, at whatever stage we introduce the printed word.

By all means, let us have a 'time lag' but let us treat it as an experimental variable not as a matter of dogma.

(d) <u>Direct method or mixed approach</u>

Recent experience suggests that primary school language teaching - like all present-day language teaching - will tend to favour direct method techniques and give preference to the immediate apprehension of the foreign language and its direct use without translation and constant reference back to the child's first language. However in the teaching of adolescents and adults it is a widely accepted conviction today that two important corollaries of any direct method approach are (a) there must be careful selection and grading of material, the use of supporting visual aids, and the use of pattern drill; (b) another feature in recent years has been not to exclude translation entirely, and to use the first

language as a medium of explanation, for comparison and contrast and generally as a support.

The same principles would apply in foreign language teaching at the primary level. It would be a mistake to assume just because the children are young that they have a kind of second sight, a special magic which would stop them from misusing or misunderstanding the language they are learning.

(3) Planning and organization

One major problem which will quickly worry those who face the practical implications of introducing a language into the primary school is the difference in language learning ability among the children. It is too much to hope that just by starting early we will not in fact encounter differences in language aptitudes. Most teachers' observations and an increasing amount of research evidence point to the fact that children, at whatever age they start learning a foreign language, will vary in their language learning abilities. (e.g. Dunkel and Pillet, 1962). Some will take to it like ducks to water, others will struggle in vain.

While pupils with difficulties in language learning have always presented a problem to the language teacher, this will be accentuated by the early start since the time of language learning is stretched over a much longer period of schooling.

There is a view that pupils who will learn a foreign language must be selected. Some suggest only the brightest, others that only those with the best performance in the learning of native tongue skills should be admitted to language courses, others propose that those who do not succeed should 'drop' the language.

Here, however, lies the test of the genuineness of our intentions. If we really believe that language learning is as essential an ingredient of literacy as reading, writing or basic number, then our attitude to the problems of the slow learner should be analogous to that commonly adopted for the three R's.

In all subjects some children prove to have difficulties, e.g. in reading or in arithmetic. Such difficulties are usually treated

as problems. The inventive paedagogical mind tries to find ways of overcoming the difficulties. We do not say: "He can't read. Too bad. Let him stop trying." I believe that foreign language difficulties should be tackled in the same spirit of recognizing the difficulties, studying them and attempting to find remedial measures and differential ways of teaching in overcoming them.

Other planning problems which await an answer through experience are:

How can a language be fitted into the primary curriculum?
What is the best distribution of time?
Will the time spent on it displace something else?
Will the time and effort spent on the language help or hinder progress in other subjects?

At present the tentative answer is that the language does not require a large portion of time, but would do best with small amounts, e.g. twenty or thirty minutes daily or every other day spread over the teaching week with regularity. The teacher is also encouraged to co-operate with teachers of other subjects so that the language leads to some cross-fertilization: thus co-operation with the teaching of history, geography, art and music, dance and games and even cookery classes can be envisaged. Above all, one would urge a joint policy to be worked out to the teaching of language in general which co-ordinates the teaching of a foreign language with that of the native language.

Looking at it from the point of view of subsequent education, the teaching of a language at the primary stage demands a clear policy of language work for the schools that follow on. There must be an opportunity for continuing and building up. This is why the help and goodwill of the linguists in secondary schools is such an essential feature of this reform. It may involve recasting of courses which were based on quite different assumptions. Thus one would hope that the secondary schools will be able to take language work much further and that pupils will be enabled in the secondary schools to put their foreign language to proper use. Moreover, the early start of one foreign language may make practical the acquisition of at least one other language, without

demanding an undue pre-occupation with linguistic subjects in the secondary school.

(4) The teachers

In all countries where languages in the primary schools are planned or beginning to be introduced the problem of finding and training teachers of foreign languages has been as yet the main stumbling block. It is the crucial problem. However impressive teaching aids may be - and there are indeed some very good ones produced with the shortage of teachers in mind: films and television can make up for a great deal - these depend in turn on good class-room use.

Experience has shown that ideally the teacher ought to be a good primary teacher in the first place and in the second place, a good linguist. A good primary teacher with an interest and willingness to learn is better than a trained linguist or a native speaker who does not understand the educational needs of primary children. Moreover, good television or radio lessons and material recorded on tapes or discs can compensate to a remarkable extent for linguistic deficiencies in the teacher.

If teachers are to be trained the following qualities must be particularly developed:

(1) The teachers need a good command of the language, especially the spoken language of today.

(2) They need some familiarity with existing courses and techniques and an understanding of the underlying psychological and linguistic principles.

(3) They should acquire some background to the culture of the country concerned, particularly its life and society today, but also its literature, music, art, achievements, science and technology - especially with reference to those aspects that are related to the lives of children and young people.

(4) They should acquire a repertoire of games, songs and activities which lend themselves to application in the language work.

If we truly want to break away from the nineteenth century

nationalist concept of the primary school we need facilities for international exchanges of students training to be teachers in primary schools and of trained teachers, as well as for training in each other's countries, and the exchange of trainers of teachers. At the secondary stage and at the universities the scheme for an exchange of students working as assistants in schools is well established. The possibilities to be explored for the primary teachers range from vacation courses, service in colonies de vacances to teaching in primary schools abroad in general school subjects or in, say, science, or music, or physical education, or art or craft, in addition to teaching their own language.

(5) Evaluation of results and research

Language teaching in the primary school is founded, as we have tried to show, on sound pedagogical reasoning. Its merits do not depend on any overwhelming evidence that it is so much better than language teaching at other stages. Nevertheless it would be disturbing if it was found if secondary teachers consistently had the impression that children with a primary start are worse in their language work than those without it or if no raising of standards could be noted. In addition to gaining experience and evaluating our experience by exchanges of opinion and ideas some objective assessments of results and of long-term effects would be invaluable.

Likewise, it has been indicated that there are controversial issues, questions of balance of emphasis or variation in techniques or materials. Here, too, carefully designed experiments attempting to compare different approaches would contribute to success. The need for research based on recognized and well tried research procedures will be pleaded no doubt by others in this conference. Here it will only be necessary to say that such research effort could well be spent on primary language teaching.

All present-day thought and practice in language teaching is much influenced by linguistics and by psychology, and this has its repercussions also on language teaching in the primary school. These influences are beneficial. They widen the range of possibilities and offer a wealth of choices. It is not possible here to trace the many suggestions which can be derived from psychology or linguistics. One point however does need emphasis. Psychology and

linguistics are wide areas of study. It is misleading to try to derive specific recommendations or methods from their findings. Any narrow dogmatic rules of method which claim to be based on psychology or linguistics should straightway be treated with suspicion. If we want to learn the lessons of psychology or linguistics it is worth remembering that both are sciences and that both involve theory, observation, and experiment. If we seriously want to allow them to influence our approach to problems of methods of teaching at the primary stage we should adopt a tolerant, questioning, experimental outlook, and invite and take part in research on language and the teachers of languages.

Conclusion

In this talk the attempt has been made to examine critically the present interest and achievement in introducing a foreign language into the primary education of children.

This reform has been looked upon as part of a general expansion of language teaching which in turn is part of a wider historical and educational movement of closer inter-action among the nations of the world.

It is welcome as a break with the monoglot tradition of the primary school and we look upon it as an extension of the concept of literacy. At the same time it is an enrichment of the primary school curriculum. It can be justified as a valuable experience in the humane education of children.

On the other hand a warning was uttered not to expect too much from it. It is one among several measures which can improve the language learning situation. It is not the panacea.

Attention has also been drawn to the problems and difficulties which a reform in this direction is likely to encounter. In planning it is important not to overrate the linguistic abilities of children nor to underrate their intellectual capacities. The courses provided must neither offend the best intentions of primary education nor insult the developing intelligence of children. Failure and frustration in language learning at this stage would merely lay the foundation of antagonism to language learning at later stages and for national insularity or prejudice.

Courses must be carefully planned and systematic. They should stimulate intelligence, they should be enjoyable, arouse interest and provide useful experience from a linguistic and cultural point of view. An oral emphasis is desirable but it must not be driven to a hostility towards writing and towards the printed word which are, after all, the lifeblood of the primary school. Imitation, drill and habit-forming practice are needed in a language, but not to the point of revulsion and boredom and not automatic of the kind which refuses to answer questions and rebuffs the curiosities of children and their wish to understand and to explain.

Teachers of languages at this stage need appropriate training for this task and experience abroad and they must be supported by material, including books, recordings, audiovisual aids, etc.; therefore the enterprise must be sustained by specific research into the languages to be taught as well as into methods of teaching them.

All this is well under way to-day. It is no mean undertaking. Let us continue in this direction and make sure that it will succeed.

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